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THROUGH COSTA RICA THE MAGNIFICENT ON A MOTOR CAR

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THROUGH COSTA RICA, THE MAGNIFICENT, ON A MOTOR CAR[1]

A WONDERFUL journey it was. Through jungles, across the slopes of foothills, into forests whose tropical luxuriance suggested the foreworld, over rivers and along palm-bordered beaches almost to the Panama line; into the main foothills, too; across great swamps marked by fern-like growths recalling plants of a prehistoric coal age, with giant fronds 60 to 80 feet long, palms, creepers, orchids, flowering vines, lilies, in gorgeous riotous brilliant colors, and birds as vividly hued as the flowers, huge trees rising on roots that, springing from the water, twisted like the folds of Brobdignagian pythons; into busy villages, and historic cities whose courteous people boast the proudest blood of ancient Spain; past neatly ordered estates; by groves of cacao and rubber; through banana plantations embracing tens of thousands of acres.

And up the roaring Reventazon River we went, following the picturesque railway line on one of the strangest rides in the world from modern Port Limon on the Carribbean coast to San Jose, the beautiful capital of Costa Rica on the high interior plateau. A prodigious stream is the Reventazon in high water. It has been known to roll an 80-ton locomotive as lightly as a pebble for 10 miles down its course. One follows it from the low plains adjoining the eastern coast up one of the most appalling gorges in the world, the right of way gradually climbing until the river appears as a silver ribbon far beneath. Approaching Cartago near the summit of the divide the railroad line finally leaves the valley and soon thereafter slips into San Jose.

All told, including main lines, spur lines, and tramways, there must be something like six hundred miles of railroad in Costa Rica. Over all of these we went upon our bounding motor, except on the Government line between San Jose and Puntarenas, the Pacific coast port, over which I took the regular passenger train for the 75-mile run. Also, since not all of Costa Rica may be seen from the railroad, I journeyed by gasoline launch, mule back, and diligencia.

It was not yet light when we first set out from the railroad yards at Port Limon. But the switchmen and track tenders were already

[1] By Hamilton M. Wright.

Photographs by Hamilton M. Wright.

SCENES AT LIMON AND CARTAGO.

Upper: Piers upon which the fruit trains are run and from which the fruit is delivered to mechanical loaders and carried aboard ship. Center: Railway yards and warehouses of the Northern Railway. Lower: General view of Cartago, one of Costa Rica's oldest and most attractive cities.

Photographs by Hamilton M. Wright.

ALONG THE LINE OF THE NORTHERN RAILWAY.

Upper: Zent, a pleasant and picturesque little railway station in the banana region between Limon and San Jose. Note the attractive residences of officials of the fruit company operating the Zent district. Center: A tropical forest scene on the Raventazon River, which stream is followed by the railway for many miles. Lower: Railway passenger train at Sequirres, a station 30 miles inland from Limon. The depot stands on the right of the track and only the top is visible.

at their posts and halloo'ed a cheery well-wishing as our slight car gathered momentum and passed from the sleeping town, turned south and west across the river where lay the largest sea turtle farm in Central America, and with clear tracks for the first 40 miles started in the direction of the Panama border.

The air was chill and the speed of the railway motor gave penetration to the cold. Even at sea level it is cold at night and one is uncomfortable without a blanket. Always nature has her compensations. There are, in reality, four distinct climates and four distinct zones of largely differing appearance and production in the little Republic of Costa Rica which, by the way, is considerably more than twice the size of Switzerland and could comfortably support a population of 20,000,000.

There is the moist semitropical climate of the Carribean coast region down which we were proceeding that morning. It is a region of sudden showers, great rainfall, and hot, moist climate broken by the trade winds, and cool breezes that come from the mountains or are tempered by the sea. For tropical glory and luxuriance, for amazing diversity in plant, insect, and bird life, this region is probably not surpassed in the world.

There is the cool and pleasant, altogether charming climate of the uplands, the Tierra Templada, the great plateau region of the Cordilleras, where San Jose, Cartago, and other cities are located midway between the oceans. There is the cold region of the higher mountains with its chilling mists and often ice and frosts. And, finally, there is the warmer Pacific coast with its distinctively dry season from December until April, where the prolonged absence of rain is evident in less underbrush and jungle than marks the Caribbean side and where, in dry season, brush fires and forest burnings are not unusual.

But back to our motor car. The first shafts of the morning sun gild the hilltops in gold, leaving black shadows in the hollows. Every leaf and petal is bathed in heavy dew. A large bird sits sunning itself and preening feathers on a dead limb 100 feet above ground. Increasing batteries of light unfold the country in panorama. No conservatory in the world, however magnificent its display of orchids and exotic flowers, of majestic palms, or of brilliantly colored and fanciful plants could rival the millions of acres of the dense and wonderful growths beheld in Costa Rica. Great wreaths of mist are drifting from the valleys. Birds are calling from the forests. Kingfishers go winging up the streams and, in the shallow pools, the white plumed heron and her mate hunt frogs and minnows. A young Jamaica Negro and his bride each with a shotgun, out after game, perhaps a luscious tepescuinte or paca, perhaps a turkey, pass us on the right of way. Giant trees, 150 to almost 200 feet in

Photographs by Hamilton M. Wright.

VIEWS OF SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA.

Upper: General view of the city. The large edifice in the background is the municipal theater. Center: Crowd on the steps of the cathedral awaiting the coming of a procession. Lower: General view of the city.

STREET SCENES IN SAN JOSE.

Upper: A good view of the stately columns of the cathedral fronting on a plaza in the heart of the capital. Center: Another street with imposing buildings. Lower: The Avenida Central. The building over which the flag flies is the legation of the United States. The balconies fronting the street are a special feature of Central and South American architecture.

height, with clear boles 80 to 100 feet up to the first branches, crowd thickly into dark green forests that stretch away in unending masses, merging, finally, into the rough flanks of the distant Cordilleras. These forests, embracing rosewood, mahogany, and more than 45 other varieties of hardwoods, are worth billions of dollars. Ferns, yellow lilies, and morning-glories line the railway embankment. Long vines trail from the tops of the tallest trees to the earth. Orchids blossom in every crevice of the branches and graceful tree ferns rise at the edge of the clearings.

It does not begin to get warm until 9 or 9.30 in the morning and it is not hot until 11. But even at that hour in the glades of the forest and in the forest aisles cut for the railroad lines it is cool. As for underbrush, in these virginal forest growths, there is scarcely any. If one knows the lay of the country he may ride for days at a time without leaving the forest shadows. Swamps may be and usually are impassable. So, too, are forests which have been burned or cut over, thus allowing space and light to encourage the growth of underbrush. But many of the woods have clear floors and the darkness below is only broken where the tropical sun, glinting through the infrequent spaces of the dense tree tops, sends down golden shafts of light. I had heard that there are many snakes in Costa Rica but in six weeks' constant traveling saw but one.

About noon we stopped for luncheon at Estrella, a small hacienda settlement near the end of the line. But before this we had halted to visit a small but thriving cotton plantation, a nursery for the growing of coconut trees, and I had gotten off the car once to photograph a troop of monkeys playing in a lofty tree near the track, but at once they grew silent and disappeared. The cotton grew lustily on a flat of black soil near a river. The coconuts had been planted under the shade of bananas and were almost ready for transplanting to the sandy sea beach.

The midday meal in Costa Rica is usually quite an affair, partly because there are at hand so many appetizing things to be eaten, but more particularly since there are no bounds to the hospitality of a Costa Rican, whether he be rich or poor. In this case we had a delicious pavo, or wild turkey, as the pièce de résistance of our meal, and also some appetizing cuts of a wild hog that had been killed the day before. Oranges, nectarines, bananas, egg plants, alligator pears, Irish potatoes and cabbages from the highlands, lettuce, yams, orange marmalade, and pastries completed a repast that was finished off by the delicious Costa Rican coffee which comes as a bottled extract, the preparation of the coffee requiring only the application of the extract to the warmed milk. In commenting upon meals, it may be observed that Costa Rica is a paradise for the sportsman and nature lover and the abundance of wild game contributes not a little to the menus of

TYPICAL RESIDENCES OF REPRESENTATIVE COSTA RICANS IN SAN JOSE.

Photograph by Hamilton M. Wright.

SCENES IN SAN JOSE.

Left: One of the principal hostelries. Many excursion parties in recent years have taxed this and other hotels to capacity, and a magnificent new establishment is proposed.
Right: New post-office building, under construction when the picture was taken.

the residents and also of the visitors at the hotels. Wild pigeons were served in the hotels of San Jose when the writer was there. There are two well-known varieties of wild turkeys and at least seven game birds of allied genera. Quite as great a delicacy for the table is the magnificent curassow, of which the crested variety is the best known. This fine bird, with broad brown-flecked breast, stands quite as high as its cousin the turkey. It travels usually in groups of from 4 to 12 birds. I have several times seen them in clearings in the forests. Deer abound, wild hogs, and also the smaller peccaries, are very numerous. When feed becomes scarce the hogs migrate, in huge droves, from one portion of the country to another. It happened that I stopped near the scene of one of these migrations, near the flanks of Mount Turrialba. More than 800 hogs were said to comprise the herd, and fresh pork became quite plentiful. This was by no means an unusually large herd, for I am credibly informed that as many as 2,000 sturdy, nervous porkers have been seen in a single herd.

It was dusk that night when we again came into the railroad yards at Port Limon. This attractive city, center of the yards and shops of the Northern Railway of Costa Rica, was well lighted and had thrown aside the cares of the day. The municipal band was rendering a concert in the public park. Well-dressed throngs listened to the music or promenaded in the evening breeze upon one of the two great steel and concrete piers that, provided with railway trackage, cranes, and derricks, give Costa Rica, on the Atlantic coast, unsurpassed facilities for the transport of passengers and freight. Indeed it is customary for chartered steamers with excursionists to be met on the pier by special trains. A seven hours' ride takes them to San Jose.

He who rises early must repair to bed betimes. Next morning at dawn we were well upon our way to the dashing River Reventazon. Sleepy homes we passed surrounded by cacao orchards, or groves of oranges, tangerines, or grapefruit, homes from whose chimneys wisps of gray smoke rose into the chill morning air, telling of a day's work already begun. For the first 35 miles out of Port Limon the railway gradually creeps to the foothills. Low rolling country, haciendas, pastures marked by huge moss-bearded trees, occasional lagoons mirroring their surroundings, and villages of Jamaica natives are features of the landscape. Then comes the abrupt transition into another world; the precipitous journey to the highlands.

The splendor points of the great American Rockies, Pike's Peak, Long's Peak, Mount Harvard, Mount Yale, and Mount Princeton, rise thirteen and fourteen thousand feet above the sea. Those who are inspired by the spectacular phenomena of nature travel thousands of miles to behold these majestic cloud-swept crags and their vast crevasses of ice and snow. But these appealing peaks start from an

SCENES IN THE CAPITAL CITY, SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA.

Upper: Artillery barracks on the extreme right; offices of the minister of war in center. Center: The new penitentiary. Lower: The insane asylum. These large grounds, abounding in fine shade trees, shrubbery, etc., afford excellent recreation for patients who are not dangerous. A great outer wall surrounds the grounds.

Photographs by Hamilton M. Wright.

MODERNIZING INFLUENCES IN COSTA RICA.

Upper: The motor car is growing in popularity and is an incentive for constructing improved highways. The car shown in the picture belongs to the post office department and greatly quickens mail service. Lower: Interior view of one of the new creameries where butter and cheese are manufactured in increasing quantities.

environing territory that is as much as 6,000 feet above sea level. The heights of the mountains in relation to the country about them is to that extent diminished. Contrast with Colorado's peaks the Andean chain extending through Costa Rica. Chirripo Grande, the tallest of these, is 13,424 feet high; Mount Poas and Mount Irazu, the volcanoes, and a score of other peaks are somewhat less. But it is scarce 160 miles from sea to sea in Costa Rica. Her peaks rise almost from the sea itself, the rapid ascent being most pronounced upon the Pacific side.

The glories of the Alps or the Andes, of the Canadian or the American Rockies do not transcend, in my opinion, those of the Central American Switzerland. From the lava swept crater of grim Mount Irazu may one behold two oceans. On a bright day, when the clouds are low, he may look upon that most remarkable of visions, snow white fields of mist, as far as the eye can reach, under the radiant, brilliant light of the tropical highlands, a light undiminished in intensity by the mists of sea level. And at nightfall he may regard the sun, magnified many times, as a ball of molten fire, it sinks into purple, red, and white seas of cloud.

On the way to the lower canyon of the Reventazon one sees many of those curious and intelligent birds, the great golden tailed oriole, called by the Spanish "Ora Pendula." The Ora Pendula, which is about the size of a small crow, iridescent blue-black, and with bright yellow tail, weaves a gourd-shaped hanging nest, from 3 to even 4 feet in length, of the fibers of banana, the long skeins of Spanish moss, or, if these be not handy, of what material it can find. The orifice is small, reaching not more than 3 inches in diameter, but the lower part of the nest is a foot or more wide. I have counted 147 of these nests upon the lofty branches of a silk cotton tree. Strands that, altogether, will measure not more than the thickness of one's little finger are employed to attach the new home to the limb, and their weaving is the first construction undertaken by the clever little artificer, since the entire nest is built from the top downward. The nest does not last more than one season, for the exposure disintegrates the fibers. The golden tails are most companionable birds, and are indifferent to the presence of human beings. Once, while dining, we heard a great commotion in a nest in a nearby tree. It was violently agitated and raucous cries came from within. The parent birds hovered about calling in great distress. Thinking a serpent had gained access a shot was fired through the upper portion. When, to our surprise, there emerged the bloody murderer, a toucan bird. Canaries, linnets, and humming birds are everywhere, and their absence of fear renders a journey most interesting. Vultures, of course, abound. Once, rounding a curve at 35 miles per hour, we came upon one starting to fly from the middle of the track. When

Photograph by Hamilton M. Wright.

COFFEE PICKING.

Upper: A Costa Rican boy hard at work on a plantation. Lower: A typical settlement of workers. Notice that the company employing them has constructed the house several feet above the ground in order to make life more healthful.

Photographs by Hamilton M. Wright.

PHASES OF COSTA RICAN COFFEE PRODUCTION.

Upper: Coffee drying beds where the grain is exposed to the sun. Center: Large piles of coffee berries and a few of the workers. Lower: One of the mills where the berries are washed and the outer husk removed.

we reached him he had risen no higher than my shoulders, and almost overturned the car.

For 60 miles the Reventazon River dashes down a bowlder-strewn course, a cascade of white. One enters by the lower valley of the Reventazon which, within 2 miles becomes precipitous, the walls of the hills soon rising 1,500 to 2,000 feet. The railroad ascends the gorge until it is almost 1 mile above the river, hanging to the edges of precipitous cliffs. In that brief 60 miles one ascends from the Tropics to the Temperate Zone. Like Jack in the Bean Stalk, he clambers into a new world set above the clouds.

Cartago, ancient seat of learning, is the first city on the line after leaving the canyon of the Reventazon. It has an altitude of 5,000 feet above sea level, and is slightly on the Atlantic side of the Continental Divide. The city has been almost entirely rebuilt since it was destroyed by a trembler proceeding from Mount Irazu a few years ago, and the ruins of that earthquake have been crushed to make fine, broad city streets. Cartago has a population of about 12,000 persons. Near the city is a famous hot spring, much patronized by tourists. Those who visit the summit of Irazu often start from Cartago. The journey may be easily made by mule back in half a day. The incline is gradual. Indeed from Cartago Irazu belies its lofty elevation, 11,200 feet, and seems like some gigantic low-lying mound, lacking, as it does, the sharp cone or apex that usually distinguishes Central American volcanoes.

About 12 miles farther on, and over the divide, is San Jose, splendid capital of Costa Rica, altitude, 3,800 feet and a modern Athens. The city lies as on the floors of a great natural amphitheater with towering hills upon three points of the compass. Its broad streets are paved with granite blocks or else newly concreted. Its shops are smart and up-to-date with notable displays of New York and Parisian fashions. The famed Teatro Nacional, costing $1,000,000 gold, more than bears out its reputation as one of the finest theaters upon the American Hemisphere. I was particularly attracted by the sculptures in the vestibule, some of the best of which are by Costa Rican artists. That of a mother and child was executed by a promising young sculptor of Cartago. The exterior of the building is of white marble. The interior lobbies and foyer are of colored Italian marble. Old tapestries, mural paintings, gold plate, and sculptures are used in the ornamentation. The magnificent foyer is in Louis XVI architecture though the building as a whole partakes more of Italian than French renaissance. The double stairways leading from the vestibule are after those of the Paris opera house. The seats are of rosewood and mahogany with the national crest stamped in embossed leather. Downstairs adjoining the lobby are two large grill rooms, while, on the second floor, from the mag-

Upper and lower photographs by Hamilton M. Wright.

GLIMPSES OF COSTA RICA'S BANANA INDUSTRY.

Upper: Method of cutting the banana from the tree. Center: Close view of the tree and its fruit on a young plantation. Lower: Loading the fruit on a railway train by which it is shipped to the port. All bunches for foreign markets are cut while green and ripen to a yellow color some days after leaving the plantation.

Photograph by Hamilton M. Wright.

OTHER AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES.

Upper: Part of a tobacco plantation. Lower: Thriving cotton plants on the low coast lands near the border of Panama, an infant industry that promises important results.

nificently frescoed salon one passes to the president's room, the ladies dressing room and other compartments, or directly to the theater itself, in the center. The building offers a wonderful example of restraint and good taste, and is truly magnificent withal.

Round about San Jose are many attractive country homes and estates. Some of the estate dwellings are built of adobe in Spanish mission style and some of the more conventional brick. But all are spacious and have the appearance of hospitality and well being. The grounds are attractive and are ornamented with cypress, palms, flowers, and flowering vines that find so congenial a home in Costa Rica. In these countryside residences one is inevitably reminded of the old plantation homes and estates in the South of the United States before the Civil War. Those homes were famous among North Americans for their cordiality and good cheer, a reputation that, after more than 50 years, still flourishes. In Costa Rica social life has the charm of long personal acquaintance. House parties and visits among friends are most frequent, and dancing and music favorite diversions. In the homes of those who entertain one will find not only the American magazines but those of France and Spain.

The roads are well kept and hedged and not infrequently one will see merry parties setting forth on horseback, always an attractive sight, for the young women of San Jose are notable for their beauty. Also, they are accomplished, having a pronounced talent in music and a skill in literature and linguistic abilities that will surpass that of their northern sisters who usually speak but one language.

The people of Costa Rica boast as their ancestry the finest blood of Spain. This lineage is reflected in their very great courtesy. One day while driving in San Jose the driver was accosted by a policeman, whereupon he turned back and drove around the block. A lady in that block was quite ill, the officer said, and he feared the noise of the diligencia on the cobbles might cause her distress. In other ways the attitude of the people is reflected. The longest sentence that may be imposed for any crime in Costa Rica is 20 years. The percentage of crime is less than in most countries. The national penitentiary is an admirable institution with workshops where prisoners are taught furniture making, etc. Vegetables are cultivated by the prisoners in the grounds inside the walls. The national library and the museums are both of interest, the latter presenting very complete exhibitions of the fauna of the country and also relics of the Indian tribes, both present and prehistoric. Much has been written of the educational institutions of Costa Rica, and I could not add to what has been said, except, perhaps, that the work of the high-school students in painting and sculpture is often so well done that it would hardly be considered the work of amateurs and, least of all, of children.

Photographs by Hamilton M. Wright.

ON COSTA RICA'S PACIFIC SHORE.

Upper: A section of the beach at Puntarenas. The latter has about 5,000 population. Center: A glimpse of one of the parks. Lower: Turtle raising, an industry that has in recent years grown to large proportions. The two workmen have captured an extremely large specimen.

Puntarenas, on the Pacific, is the great watering place for San Jose. The train, over the Government railway, leaves San Jose about 8 in the morning, arriving at Puntarenas at 2 in the afternoon. It was with regret that I left the beautiful old capital with its life and gaiety and my new-found friends, who were so eager to make my stay a pleasant one. The train was crowded to the aisles and I was the only American aboard, but it was not long before I found myself chatting with some acquaintances of the country. At each station out of San Jose it was met by throngs of pretty misses in stylish mode, young men smartly clad in riding costumes, with black shining puttees, and numerous dog carts, and diligencias. Often one saw the picturesque old Spanish costume, the short blouse jacket, the loose braided trousers, high-heel boots, and broad-brimmed hat.

At noon all hands filed out of the train for lunch. Fried and fricasseed chicken, veal, lamb, beef, stuffed eggs, vegetables, fruits, iced drinks, beer, and coffee were sold by the pretty young women at the tables. We had been rolling downhill four hours, and still had two hours of descent before we should reach the long plateau that projects into Nicoya Gulf. Already the cypress and eucalyptus trees had disappeared, and great bunches of cacti mingled with palms and geraniums in the gardens.

At Puntarenas the hotels and clubhouses were filled. Throngs of bathers crowded the beach. Children from an orphanage from San Jose were down upon their holiday. But there were several days to wait before my steamer should come to bear me north, so I took some fascinating trips up the Gulf of Nicoya. Some day, it is said, the national railways of Nicaragua may follow the old cart road down to Costa Rica, but the route is a difficult one, and connection between Siquirres and the foot of Lake Nicaragua could probably be easier made. Puntarenas is not as developed as is Port Limon, where the Northern Railway and United Fruit Co. have developed hotels, hospitals, machine shops, storehouses, piers, etc., but with the growth of commerce upon the Pacific this development is sure to come.

One morning early a steamer whistle electrified those who waited. I hurried to the pier, got aboard a launch, and in a few hours saw fade from sight the purple shores centuries ago visited by Sir Francis Drake, but to me more vivid than any history could make them, for they marked the borders of Costa Rica, queen of the mountain lands.

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